

Book Review

Humanitarian Intervention and the United Nations: University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville, 1973.

Reviewed by DAVID OTIS FULLER, JR.

The thing that bothered me most about this book was that it was so boring. And it shouldn't have been. Humanitarian intervention is an exciting topic of international law, but I had to force myself to finish this book.

Perhaps the problem lay in the way the book was composed. It is essentially a transcript of a conference on the entitled topic attended by (in the words of one of them) a "clutch of professors, salted by a few 'practitioners.'" The participants' credentials were impressive enough, but if what they delivered in Charlottesville was sharp, their recorded remarks came out dull. Maybe this simply illustrates the difference between the written and spoken word, the importance of having been there. Where laughter, for instance, is recorded, this reader was not at all tempted to laugh.

Well, so what if the book was boring as long as something was accomplished. But was anything accomplished? The format of the proceedings was simple enough—"past, present and future"—and the scholars were ready to talk, but if there was a nugget hidden somewhere in the verbiage, I failed to find it. Even some of the participants were aware of the futility of the exercise, finding it bewildering, too anecdotal and constituting an unsuccessful search for the question.

Going back to the written versus the spoken word, though, I would venture that more was said in Professor Humphrey's forward than in the entire discussion. In his first paragraph he concisely and effectively defined and developed the term "humanitarian intervention." Then he applied the term in the context of the United Nations Charter, explained the difficulties and concluded by showing how the procedures of the Commission on Human Rights should encourage lawyers to strive for some sort of international protection of human rights in the future.

To be sure, some of the conference participants did attempt to give their

views on the role of the United Nations in humanitarian intervention. But the clarity and conviction that characterized the Humphrey analysis were lacking. Whether these deficiencies were due to the lack of structure peculiar to a conference proceeding, lack of familiarity with the intervention procedures of the United Nations or some other reason is difficult to tell from the record, but whatever the cause, the result was plainly unsatisfactory.